

NIEHS Continues Response to Gulf Oil Spill

The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) is part of the National Institutes of Health. From its home base in North Carolina, NIEHS has had a continuous presence in the Gulf region, protecting the health and safety of workers responding to the Deepwater Horizon explosion and oil spill, supporting Gulf region research efforts, and launching the GuLF STUDY, the largest study ever conducted on the possible health effects from an oil spill.

Safety Training – Within days of the explosion, staff from the NIEHS Worker Education and Training Program were on site to ensure cleanup workers were trained to protect their own health and safety while responding to the disaster. Approximately 150,000 workers were trained using NIEHS-developed materials. A “lessons learned conference” held in Mobile, Ala., in May 2011, identified ways to improve the health and safety of responders for future incidents. Many of the trained workers are being invited to participate in the NIEHS-led GuLF STUDY.



Toxicology Research – NIEHS’ National Toxicology Program obtained samples of the Deepwater Horizon crude oil and dispersants, and is conducting tests to better understand the chemistry, biological fate, and any potential toxicological effects.

University-Community Partnerships – NIEHS awarded \$25.2 million in research grants to Gulf area universities that partner with communities affected by the oil spill. This research network is addressing health questions specifically identified by the community as a need. Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center New Orleans; Tulane University, New Orleans; University of Florida, Gainesville; and The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston are the five-year grant recipients conducting research to determine if there are harmful contaminants in air, water, and seafood, and assessing the relationship to health problems.

GuLF STUDY – In June 2010, the director of NIH, Francis S. Collins, M.D., Ph.D., asked NIEHS to lead a study on the health of the workers and volunteers most directly involved in responding to the oil spill crisis. NIEHS immediately began working with the Gulf communities, as well as agencies, researchers, and outside experts, to design the study. Now, recruitment for the GuLF STUDY is underway in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida to enroll 55,000 cleanup workers and volunteers. The long-term health study will help determine if oil spills and exposure to crude oil and dispersants affect physical and mental health.

